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SUBJECT: KHOST-GARDEZ PASS ROAD SHURA IN KHOST

Summary and Comment

11. (U) Khost Governor Qalandarzai hosted over 800 elders and leaders from Khost, Paktya and Paktika provinces at a March 4 shura to showcase the benefits of USAID's \$120 million paved road from Khost City to Gardez, Paktya. Qalandarzai, along with the Paktya and Paktika governors, emphasized the road's positive impact on the region and urged residents to support the project, including by helping with security. Once completed in 2010, the 101km road will link key centers of commerce in eastern Afghanistan with each other, Kabul and the Pakistan border. The project, which employs 1,500 workers and disrupts enemy transit routes, has been attacked by insurgents as well as locals upset that work was subcontracted to an Indian company. Shura participants sent a unified message that the road is in everyone's interest, bringing improved access to schools, clinics and markets.

12. (U) With work on the Khost-Gardez (K-G) Road proceeding on the Khost side during the mild winter, Task Force Currahee encouraged Governor Qalandarzai to hold a shura to mark progress. Qalandarzai, appointed in January, invited fellow governors, tribal leaders from Khost, Paktya and Paktika, parliamentarians, ministers, the Independent Directorate for Local Governance (IDLG) and UNAMA. TF Currahee provided transportation and lunch for the event, held at ANA's Camp Parsa in Khost. The event was a companion to an August 2008 shura on the Paktya side marking the road's groundbreaking.

GOVERNORS CALL FOR UNIFIED SUPPORT

13. (U) In his remarks, Qalandarzai noted the psychological as well as physical impact of development projects. He asked the crowd to support the K-G Road project, adding that a mullah recently asked him to proceed with the road even if it requires relocating mosques along the route. "This is allowed by Islam," he said. Qalandarzai praised the Louis Berger Group (LBG), USAID's contractor for the project, and asked elders to provide whatever assistance LBG needs, including good quality materials. He told the audience he was looking for funding to widen an additional four kilometers of road near the western entrance to Khost City not covered by the current USAID project. Pointing out that education, health care and jobs all stem from good security, Qalandarzai said a joint ANSF coordination center may be established on the Paktya-Khost border.

14. (U) Paktya Governor Hamdard called on the crowd to work together, as Afghans from Khost, Paktya and Paktika did when the region was known as Loya Paktya. By supporting USAID and uniting behind a project as important as the K-G Road, elders will add their names to Afghanistan's history. He said he discussed with USAID the need to hire workers from families displaced by the road's route. Noting that the enemy is

trying to disrupt security along the road, Hamdard asked for greater coordination and support from ANSF, Coalition Forces (CF) and the people, singling out Zadran communities in Khost and Paktya. He urged elders to persuade young Afghans to go to school or join the ANSF and work for peace in Afghanistan.

15. (U) Paktika's recently appointed governor, Abdul Qayum Katawazay, echoed Hamdard's call for Loya Paktya Afghans to unite in support of the road project. Although the road does not go through his province, Katawazay said its completion is one of his top priorities because of the benefits it will bring to Paktika. He pointed out the road will reduce time required for transporting goods throughout the region, including to the Ghulam Khan border crossing point. "Please support this road; it's for your benefit," he concluded.

#### LOCAL OFFICIALS ASK ELDERS TO HELP WITH SECURITY

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16. (U) Other speakers from Paktya and Khost praised the road project for connecting the people of the region, and urged elders to help with security efforts and prevent attacks against LBG workers. Paktya Wolesi Jirga MP Sharifa Zormati congratulated the elders and officials for fulfilling the people's request for the road. "We asked for this project and it is happening," she said, adding, "If we stay united, we can reach our goal." She noted the workers are from Loya Paktya, asked the audience to support them and LBG and prevent the enemy from killing them, and pointed out that tribal forces (arbakai) are helping protect the road. She also praised the few women who had come to the event and reminded the audience of the importance of Afghan women.

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Khost Women's Affairs Director Rugwal Zadran stressed the project's economic importance, bringing jobs to poor families, improving security and bringing the people closer to their government.

17. (U) The Khost Provincial Council Chair recommended that ANSF reduce the number of checkpoints on the road and stop taking money from drivers. The council chair added, "We are sick of fighting. We are sick of enemy activity. We want peace and security in our area and good reconstruction projects like in other countries." Complaining that Loya Paktya has no minister in the central government despite the region's strong support for President Karzai, he urged elders and mullahs to choose someone to represent the region. "We should have a minister from Loya Paktya," he demanded to applause, adding, "No one can tell you who to vote for; vote for whoever you think will be good for Afghanistan." Several tribal leaders called for greater coordination within the ANSF and between the ANSF and CF. Khost Police Chief Abdul Qayum Bakazoi emphasized the ANP is working to protect Afghans, with recent returnees from the Focused District Development program conducting daily patrols, searches and checkpoints to improve security and be more responsive.

#### A FEW COMPLAINTS

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18. (U) While supportive of the K-G Road, Haji Nasim Zadran, an elder from Nadar Shah Kot in Khost, complained that poor Zadran tribal members are not being hired to work on the project. Quoting a Pashtun proverb, he said, "You say come and eat but then you don't give food." He continued, "What has the government done for us in Khost in seven years? What will they do in the next seven years?" He called on the three governors to consult first with the Zadran tribes, which predominate along the K-G Road, before meeting with other tribes. (Jalaluddin and Sirajudin Haqqani retain a power base in their home district of Gerda Serai in Paktya.) If they do, Zadran elders can help with security, including by providing tips about enemy activities in the area.

19. (U) Paktya MP Zormati also struck a mildly sour note with her remark that no ministers had bothered to attend the day's

event and continue to ignore the region. She added that they would have flocked from Kabul to the event if it been in Bamayan or Badakhshan.

WOOD